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ABSTRACT

A study of Hmong adult immigrants in a Hmong literacy class investigated four aspects of their learning behaviors: specific behaviors manifested in the literacy classroom; overt learning strategies used for literacy learning; major motivations; and specific uses for Hmong literacy skills. Data were gathered through observation, interviews, videotaping, and a survey of Hmong literacy use. Subjects were members of one class, varying in number, age, and gender at each meeting, and for the survey, a random sampling of 92 individuals from a Hmong telephone book. Results indicate consistent and related patterns of behavior influenced by Hmong cultural background and participants' existing knowledge. Observed behaviors included constant interaction for cooperative learning, great concern with exactness and clarification, expressions of lack of knowledge or ability just before completion of task, laughter, reluctance to perform in front of others, reluctance to interact with the teacher or make eye contact, and reading and speaking aloud while working. The most consistent learning strategy observed or reported was use of imagery as a memory aid. Primary motivation for Hmong literacy study was maintenance and preservation of culture. Others were communication with relatives and friends and teaching Hmong to their children. Some effective teacher behaviors were also observed. Contains 8 references. (MSE) (Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse on Literacy Educatio.)

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The Development and Study of Hmong Literacy: Ensuring the Future and Preserving the Past

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Introduction

In 1993, the Hmong Literacy Project, funded by the National Institute for Literacy, taught first language literacy skills to adult Hmong students at Mayfair School in Fresno, California. The project was designed to teach Hmong literacy and then continue with instruction in English language and literacy. The rationale for the design of the program and study along with the results of research on the learning behaviors and strategies of Hmong adults is the focus of this paper.

There has been a notable lack of success in programs to teach English language and literacy to Hmong adults in various federal, state, and private programs. Many of the English as a Second Language (ESL) programs such as classes offered through GAIN (Greater Avenues for Independence) are generally not content-relevant for adult Hmong needs and/or demand prior literacy skills. Weinstein-Shr and Lewis (1989) have found that the language, survival functions, and situations assumed in some ESL curriculum and texts for adults did not match the reality in which refugees exist and the situations for which they used language. Downing et al. (1984) argue that a major part of the problem that Hmong students face in learning English is a lack of first language literacy as well as the absence of formal schooling experience. Atkinson (1988) states that the reason that learners without literacy skills may lose interest in some ESL programs is that students cannot keep up in ESL classes due to difficulties in coping with learning both a second language and literacy skills at the same time. Speaking on educational policy and the Hmong, Strouse (1989) sees one of the problems in the education of Hmong adults in different programs was that aspects of some programs were ethnically inappropriate, with some programs containing a curriculum that was unsuitable for illiterates and that failed to take into account the cultural gap that Hmong face. In addition to this, some native-English speaking teachers in ESL programs may not be familiar with Hmong culture and learning styles, leading to potential misinterpretations, frustrations, and problems due to lack of understanding between teachers and students. In short, problems in the relevance of curriculum to the realities and needs of students, lack of first language literacy to help cope with second language and literacy development, and cultural differences may be among the major sources of failures for programs designed for Hmong adult students.

These are some problems this project sought to address in its implementation of the Hmong literacy program and related research. One of the main goals of the program is to help adults develop Hmong literacy skills so that, among other reasons, they may be better prepared to develop second language and literacy skills later on. While future research goals include the study of potential affects that first language literacy development may have on second language and literacy development and on transfer of skills, research in this part of the project focused on culturally influenced learning behaviors that Hmong adult students exhibit in the classroom and the uses that Hmong adults have for Hmong literacy skills. In order to keep a curriculum relevant to the needs and realities of the Hmong adults, one has to keep abreast of the uses for which Hmong adults use literacy skills and the motivations for developing

literacy. The purpose of this research was to gain information to help keep the curriculum of this and other Hmong literacy programs relevant to the needs and uses of Hmong adults. The purpose is to also identify and describe Hmong learning behaviors that may lead to potential misinterpretations of Hmong students' verbal and nonverbal actions and intentions and inhibit their development of language and literacy skills.

Studies of the learning behaviors of Hmong students have generally attempted to describe them in terms of cognitive and perceptual style. Worthley (1987), on the basis of data collected from the Group Embedded Figures Test among Hmong refugee students, concluded that Hmong adult male students are primarily field dependent in learning style and use primarily global problem solving strategies. Hvitfeldt (1986), in a microethnographic study of Hmong adults in an English as a second language and literacy class, identified several types of Hmong classroom learning behaviors and discussed them in terms of field dependence/independence, reliance on internal versus external frames of reference, and holistic versus analytical perceptual style.

The focus of this study, as with Hvitfeldt's, was on the identification and description of classroom learning behaviors of Hmong adult students. Hvitfeldt's study was valuable in, among other things, providing descriptions of three areas of classroom behavior: student roles and teacher roles, personalization of interaction and content, and classroom activity strategies. As with Hvitfeldt's study, this study sought to identify and describe classroom learning behaviors of Hmong adults. However, the focus was on more in-depth analysis and description of student learning behaviors more in terms of influences from the students' culture-specific background knowledge that they have built up through a lifetime of social interaction in Hmong society and culture rather than in terms of field dependence and perceptual style.

The purpose of the study was to investigate how Hmong literacy is learned and how it is used by Hmong adults. Research questions studied in this qualitative study were:

- What specific learning behaviors are manifested in the Hmong adult literacy classroom?
- What overt learning strategies do Hmong adults use to learn literacy skills?
- What are the major motivations for Hmong adults to learn Hmong literacy skills?
- What are the specific uses Hmong adults have for Hmong literacy skills?

Method

An ethnographic study of Hmong classroom behavior was carried out in a Hmong adult literacy class. Enrollment was open, and there were generally eight to twenty adult men and women of ages twenty five to sixty in attendance at any given time. The majority of students were female, and children also attended classes along with their parents.

The main research strategies employed were non-participant observation, interviews with students, teachers, and cultural informants, teacher observation and recording of verbal and nonverbal behavior, videotaping of classes, and a survey of Hmong literacy usage. The researchers observed two classes per week for a period of sixteen weeks, then conducted an intensive observation of classes four days per week for eight weeks. Native Hmong research assistants/cultural informants were present at the observations to translate verbal behavior and provide cultural information on observed verbal and nonverbal behavior. Field notes of the observations, including descriptions of behavior, transcriptions of translated discourse, and information from cultural informants were kept. Teachers recorded and interpreted observations of verbal and nonverbal behavior on a daily basis. To supplement the observations, two classes per week were videotaped and either translated and transcribed for data analysis or viewed together with a cultural informant and translator.

Surveys were conducted among the general Hmong population by native Hmong-speaking research assistants. Subjects were randomly selected from a Hmong phone book and surveyed by telephone. The surveys of ninety two subjects who reported having Hmong literacy skills were used for analysis.

Results and Analysis

These descriptions portray consistent and related patterns of behavior that are influenced by the cultural background and knowledge that Hmong adult students bring to the classroom. Though some behavior may be consistent with descriptions of certain cognitive styles such as field dependency, matching Hmong behavior to cognitive styles that are "dominant" within a particular culture is not the focus of this study, and any attempts to correlate Hmong student behavior with such here would be largely speculation. The focus here will be on cultural influences on behavior

Cooperative Learning Behavior

The most obvious and ubiquitous classroom behavior that was observed by the non-participant researcher and mentioned in most of the teacher observation reports of verbal and physical behavior was the practice of students continually learning from each other and checking each other's accuracy on different reading, writing, and math tasks. The classroom was usually a continual buzz, with students continually interacting with each other, asking help from and giving help to their peers, looking over other students' shoulders. Help was continually given to each other, often unsolicited. Students were very

sensitive to those around them and had a keen sense when other students needed help, giving help at the first sign of problem (which was usually when a student stopped what he/she was doing and looked around, laughed at their own mistake, leaned back and forth, or other verbal or nonverbal behavior). Students would pair up or form groups without teacher direction. Some students would teach each other words and sounds by, for example, saying it for other students and having them repeat after them many times. Some students read aloud together, one pointing to the words being read for the other. One student would help another fill in missing words in worksheet activities. In writing activities, students would constantly be looking over each other's shoulders to see what their neighbors were writing and making comments on their or their neighbor's writing. Sometimes they would exchange, read, and discuss each other's writing. Since there was open enrollment, there would usually be a mix of new students and old students. The old students would watch and check to see if the new students were having any problems (which was often the case) and help them. On many occasions, children were seen helping their mothers and younger siblings in reading and math activities.

Even when the students were taking tests, they would still be continually looking over each other's shoulders, comparing and verifying their work with their neighbors and asking questions. Some of the teachers tried to prohibit this practice, usually with temporary and limited success as students would eventually revert back to this habit.

According to cultural informants and interviews with some of the students, this cooperative behavior has its roots in the importance placed to the group over the individual in Hmong culture. The extended family, or household, is the basic unit of society, and the welfare and needs of this unit take precedence over those of the individual. Being sensitive and helpful to each other is important for keeping harmony within the family. As one informant explained, if one student knew an answer but failed to help another who didn't, he/she would be considered selfish. Also, within the extended family, the education and training of children is not solely the responsibility of the parent but of the extended family as a unit. Everyone within the household takes part in the informal education and training of younger children.

Concern with explicit direction and learning through example

There was also a great concern with exactness and clarification. When teachers would direct the class to do an activity, the non-participant observer noticed that an increase in the noise and interaction level would immediately follow the directions. In queries to research assistants in the class at the time of several such instances, it was explained that the students were checking with each other to clarify the instructions and make sure that they all understood what was expected. There was a great concern among students to know exactly what was asked of them. This was particularly true when students were asked to take a test. Students would be continually asking their classmates for clarification of questions and looking at what their peers were doing. If they

could not find out from their peers, students would ask the teacher to clarify the questions and give examples, saying things such as:

"I don't understand what this question means."

"Could you give me an example?"

"Do you mean...?"

During one test in particular, it took most of the class time for the teacher to answer questions on and clarify almost every single question on the test. Even straightforward questions that asked for simple facts from the readings, such as "What year did the general come to this country?", was met by questions of "What do you mean?" and requests for examples, at which point the teacher would come up with examples such as "When did you come the U.S. from Thailand?".

In fact, learning from examples and demonstrations seemed to be a major style of learning among most students. Particularly in the math lessons, there were constant requests for examples and for the teacher to demonstrate on the board. Also, it was observed that, in most instances, the help that was given, solicited or unsolicited, among peers was in the form of modeling. Unless a student specifically asked another student for an explanation, the person giving help would generally just do the particular task for another student instead of explaining how to do it. When research assistants and teachers were questioned about this, they explained that, when students asked peers for help, peers were expected to do what was asked for others. They further explained that it would be considered rude to try to tell and explain how something was done instead of simply showing them by doing it, unless a student asked for an explanation. One researcher experienced this first hand when a student asked for help on a math problem. As the researcher's teaching style in general was helping student discover for themselves how to do something, the researcher encouraged the student to try to figure it out with guidance from the researcher. The student seemed to become a little upset, then turned and asked another student to write the answer.

These Hmong students' frequent requests for examples may have been a way for them to get more information to relate to a known, personal context through which to interpret and incorporate what is being taught into their background knowledge. It may also be a culture-based learning style. When students were asked, a common response was that it is just the way they learned. Citing research by the Center for Applied Linguistics, Walker (1989) states that the learning style of Hmong children is mainly learning by doing, observation, and example:

> Young people watch and listen while cloth is woven, fields plowed and tools made. If they learn a second language they do so by working alongside people from other villages...They learn by example. (Center for Applied Linguistics, 1984; cited in Walker, 1989, p. 8)

This type of learning by observation and example seems to be one of the preferred learning styles common among the Hmong students observed in this study.

Answers or completion of tasks prefaced by expressions of lack of ability or knowledge

Some of the most common phrases continually heard throughout the observations were:

"I don't know well, but..."

"I'm not sure but I'll try..."

"I'm embarrassed to say this, but..."

"I don't know the answer, but..."

Every single student I observed would say something such as this whenever he or she was asked to do or answer something by the teacher. Students would not volunteer answers, and were generally hesitant to even answer when called upon, even when they knew the answer. When a teacher would ask a student a question, the first response would usually be "I don't know." After further prompting (if the teacher perceived that they did know the answer), students would then give their answer. Even the male and female teachers, when they would give researchers their logs and observations would generally say things along the lines of "I'm embarrassed to give you what I have written..." as they handed over the materials.

According to the cultural informants, this was in line with Hmong culture, as there is a general tendency for one to avoid the appearance of "showing off". General accepted behavior is to be humble about your abilities. In fact, it was stated by students and cultural informants that the more you know, the more humble you should be. If students volunteered many answers, asked a lot of questions or to talked a lot, they were considered "show-offs" by other students, as in the case of two particular students. If students were called upon to answer, were put in a position to show their abilities, or handed in work, it was considered polite to preface such with expressions of humbleness about their knowledge, abilities, or work.

Related to this is the lack of individual compliments that was observed in the class. It was observed by three research assistants that teachers and students would not give each other direct compliments. A teacher would only directly compliment a group or the whole class, not an individual. Teachers and students would only give individual compliments indirectly, such as through a third party (usually a research assistant) or to the group.

Laughter

Laughter also was a common occurrence in the classroom, so much so that one American observer was disturbed, thinking that the students did not take their education seriously. However, this laughter indicated several things that were quite different from such an observation. Students generally giggled or laughed whenever they made a mistake, were having problems, or were not sure of what they were doing or answers they were giving. This is one of the ways teachers could tell who was having problems. New students in particular, when they were lost in the class, tended to giggle. One could almost guess which students were new and which weren't by judging the amount of giggles and laughter that emanated from each student. Whenever one student laughed whenever he/she made a mistake, other students around him or her would laugh also. According to the research assistants, this is meant as a show of support as a way of "softening the mistake" as they put it. It is a way of helping the student save face when he or she makes a mistake. Also, when students handed in their assignments, laughter, along with phrases such as "I don't think it's very good" was a way of showing their humbleness.

Reluctance to perform in front of others

It was observed that students were generally very nervous about performing in front of the class. For example, students were very reluctant to go to the board and write, although some of the teachers would have students do this. When asked about this, teachers and cultural informants explained that this reluctance was due mainly to fear of making mistakes and looking bad or foolish.

Also, expressions of denial of ability, such as those discussed above, could also be a way of saving face in some contexts, such as when a student was put in a position where he or she was not sure of their ability or knowledge but had to perform in front of others. In one particular instance, the observer heard a male student make this comment to the class on the way to the board:

> "When you watch someone do it, you know it, but when it comes to actually doing it, especially in front of everybody on the board, you get forgetful."

The research assistant in the class, after translating this, informed the observer that this was the student's way of saving face. Prefacing his performance with this remark was a way of inferring that any potential mistake was not necessarily due to his lack of ability or knowledge but of forgetfulness while performing in front of everyone. Another student said that she felt humiliated when she read aloud and said something wrong, and that this fear was holding her back.

The concern with saving face presented some problems to the program. It was initially decided, upon request by the students and some teachers, to have separate classes for the men and women. However, many of the students, both male and female, were so motivated to learn that they would come to every

class they could, so the classes quickly became mixed. However, some of the male students stopped coming to the classes.

Interaction with teachers

The classroom itself is teacher-centered and directed. The teachers select all the tasks and assignments to be done. At the beginning of the course, one researcher once suggested to some of the teachers to get some input from the students as to what they themselves wanted to learn. The results were generally laughter, puzzled looks, and comments such as "I don't know", "We are stupid." and "Go ahead and do whatever you want." The teachers and one cultural informant explained to us that, in the Hmong culture, it is the teacher's job to know what to teach. Students would not tell teachers their opinions on this because it would be considered rude to tell a teacher what to do. Also, as mentioned above, students would generally ask for help from their peers and rarely from the teacher. It was explained that students ask the teacher as the last resort out of respect, as asking the teacher means (to the students) that you are giving them extra work.

One other aspect of teacher-student interaction was that students would not make eye-contact with teachers. According to teachers and students, it would be disrespectful to look the teacher directly in the eyes.

Reading Aloud and Speaking while Writing

One of the most constant behaviors observed was the practice of students reading aloud as they read and speaking aloud as they write. Only some, not all, of the children would read aloud, but all of the adults would. This was not just sounding out words they had problems with (although they did do that as well) nor was it reading aloud round- robin style by direction of the teacher, as many students were very uncomfortable reading aloud in front of many people and would read only loud enough for themselves or immediate neighbors to hear. This practice was consistent individual reading aloud no matter how fluently they read and wrote. They would read aloud when reading a story or text by themselves (usually in a quiet voice or whispering, almost to the point of subvocalizing but not quite.). They would read aloud when reading in pairs. They would read aloud to themselves what was on the blackboard while they would be copying it down. They would speak aloud when they were doing writing exercises or free writing. When asked why they did this, students responded in a variety of ways:

"I want to hear how I sound."

"I can tell whether it sounds alright or not."

"I want to hear if I am reading alright."

"There is not much difference between oral and written language."

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In general, most students I heard from told me that they understood better when they hear what they are reading and that it was easier to write when they verbalized their thoughts as they wrote them.

When asked, some informants said that they believed that this is related to the oral traditions of the Hmong culture. However, this was stated as a belief, not as knowledge. Since the data is inconclusive, no such claims are made here.

Learning Strategies

The most consistent strategy observed or reported in the teacher observations was the strategy of using imagery as a memory aid, in which students associate a letter with a picture. Students were observed drawing a flower next to the letter P or a cat on top of M (the letters begin words that stand for flower or cat), or associating the letter S with a snake. Many if not most of the students were either observed or reported themselves the use of imagery. There are isolated reports or observations of other strategies, such as using letters in a song as a memory aid, relating letters to friend's and family member's names, focusing on visually salient features of letters to distinguish and remember, associating sounds of letters and animal sounds, visualizing objects from their memory of their country and farm (such as cows and chickens) to use as aids in math, using physical responses such as hand movements to remember tone group markings, practice through repetition, taking notes (a very common strategy), highlighting (particularly color-coding or making different symbols) and getting help.

Motivation and Literacy Usage among the Hmong

When asked, the main reason that most of the students in the Hmong Literacy Project gave for wanting to learn how to read and write in Hmong was the maintenance and preservation of their culture. Many of them expressed the fear that if concerned Hmong people do not write down everything about their culture, including stories, folktales, what it was like in the home country, tradition and history, etc., that it will all disappear when the current generation dies. This concern was reflected in what students chose to read or write about. Most of the students chose to write about their experiences escaping from the Communists in order to add material to the history of the Hmong. Folktales and stories were commonly chosen reading material.

Initially, there was great concern that their children learn to speak and function in English in order to survive and succeed here, but now there is an even greater concern that children are losing the Hmong language and/or not developing Hmong literacy skills, do not understand the Hmong heritage, and will not be able to pass on this knowledge to their descendants. They feel that now they are learning to write Hmong, they are the ones who can now make a difference, as they were unable before to adequately express about their history and culture in English. Many said that their experiences and "deep inner feelings" can't be interpreted the same way in English. Many said that now it is not alright, there is no excuse, for being illiterate in Hmong.

These concerns were expressed throughout the course by student after student, and the regulars, those who came month after month, were determined to do something about it. Initially set up with alternating class days for men and women, many men and women began attending everyday and the classes became mixed. Originally for adults, both men and women began bringing their children to learn. By July, men and women began asking teachers if they could have another Hmong teacher within the classroom to specifically teach the children attending the course.

Most of the women who regularly attended expressed the desire to teach their children how to read and write in Hmong. Two women expressed the opinion that learning Hmong literacy was a way of getting some "power" back, that now they can show their children that they can read and write and can teach them. Some of these housewives in particular were very determined to learn. Three of the students attended class continued to attend class without absence even with deaths among their relatives. One group of housewives became very angry at people who would come late or absent the class and would try to think up penalties for those people. Two students suggested several times that the group stay at school until people come or until midnight at least in order to shame those who were late or absent. Teachers had to explain to them that the school would not allow this.

In the survey among the general Hmong population, people were asked if it was important for Hmong people to be able to read and write in their own language and why it was important or not important. Among the respondents, seventy nine percent said that it was important while twenty one percent thought it was not important. All those reporting that it was not important (as well as three who said that it was) stated that literacy in Hmong was not used or useful to Hmong people here in America. Among those who stated that it was important, twenty eight percent stated simply that Hmong people should know how to read and write their own language, twenty two percent said that it was important in order to retain their language and culture, and twenty six percent stated some kind of practical reason.

Another main reason for learning Hmong literacy skills that students reported were communicating with family members, relatives, and friends left behind in Laos or refugee camps in Thailand and in other parts of the U. S. Many students reported reading and writing personal correspondence to relatives and friends in Laos, Thailand, and other states in the U. S. Also, one of the most successful classroom exercises in terms of quality and quantity of student production, according to the teacher observation log, was an assignment to respond to letters sent by parents in a similar literacy class in Wisconsin. In the next class period, students excitedly exchanged letters they had written with other students and read them, and the teachers commented that it was the first time that some of the students had successfully completed and turned in assignments and that students "were proud of themselves."

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This use of literacy skills was widely reported among the respondents in the survey of the general Hmong population. Among ninety two adults who reported possessing some degree of Hmong literacy skills, over sixty nine percent reported reading personal correspondence from family, relatives, and friends in Laos and Thailand and seventy nine percent reported writing letters to same.

Some students also expressed a desire to keep up with what is happening in the community, in the U. S. and back in Laos. A newsletter was periodically written and published by the students and teachers, with news about the community and the world at large along with personal stories. The newsletter was distributed to all the parents at Mayfair school and to the surrounding community. It served also as class reading material for lower level classes. In the general Hmong survey, forty percent reported reading newspapers and newsletters, with the Hmong Times the most common one read.

Discussion of the Results and Implications

In any class, whether Hmong literacy or ESL, for Hmong students, teachers have an advantage when they know the students and culture they are dealing with. Knowledge through which to interpret certain classroom verbal and nonverbal behaviors of students from different cultures is an important asset to any effective teacher. Student laughter may not necessarily mean that some students are goofing off, not taking the class seriously, or enjoying themselves. As mentioned earlier, it may signal problems, mistakes, and embarrassment, or a sign of support or commiseration from one student to another. The failure to look a teacher in the eyes may be more out of respect than deviousness or discomfort. Cries of "I don't know." and other statements of incapability and uncertainty laughter may sometimes be a way for students to appear humble and avoid being a show-off, at which point student may be further encouraged to answer. At other times it may signal lack of knowledge, frustration, and inability to answer or perform. Many times Hmong students said that they didn't know anything or that they were too old or stupid to learn (even 30 year old men and women expressed this). Students at times were quite insecure about their abilities to learn, and this showed up in observations as well as teacher observation logs time and again. A teacher has to recognize when cries of "I don't know" and such are real or just a way of not appearing to be a show-off.

Throughout the Hmong Literacy Project, it was observed that certain teachers, particularly one female teacher, were quite effective in terms of student attendance and production. Six students were interviewed as to what made teachers in general, and the female teacher in particular, good teachers. The traits that the interviewees considered most important were the ability to understand student behavior and motivate them, the ability to teach students without putting students into situations which would embarrass them or cause them to lose face, and sincerity. Given a choice to compare these traits with traits such as excellent teaching techniques and different approaches to teaching, students still rated them as most important.

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After careful observation of one particular teacher whom most students felt was the most effective teacher and further interviews with cultural informants, students, and the teacher in question, other characteristics that were considered very important in a teacher came to light. The teacher was very good at reading students' nonverbal language and inferring their intentions, interests, and desires. The teacher could readily sense when students were having difficulties and quick to adjust to make the instruction more comprehensible without putting any attention to those having difficulties. As mentioned above, students would say that they understood even if they didn't so as to be polite and not place additional burdens on the teacher on their account. When asked, the teacher and another cultural informant said that it is the teacher's job to figure out if students are understanding or not in the Hmong culture. When asked how she did this, the teacher mentioned that she could sense from their facial expressions and eyes, the way they looked around at other, and from body language such as leaning back and forth. The teacher also mentioned that students would usually chuckle when they were having problems.

The most effective teacher was also adept at quickly ascertaining whether a student really didn't know an answer, at which point she didn't press the student, or whether the student was just being humble and really knew the answer, at which point she encouraged the student to answer. The teacher would indirectly correct minor errors and, for more serious mistakes, talk to the individual students themselves without letting other students hear. The teacher also never complimented an individual student personally in class. All this is related to not embarrassing the student, as singling out students, for either praise, criticism, or identification of individual problems, may be embarrassing to the student.

The teacher also seemed sensitive to what students wanted to learn without having to ask them. As mentioned above, students expect the teacher to know best, and this particular teacher was able to infer what activities and topics were most interesting and relevant to their lives. Her students always seemed very involved in the activities and discussions in her class, and topics the teacher based lessons on included ones such as family issues, culture, generation gap, cultural conflicts, marriage, sickness, and other topics that were relevant to students' immediate lives.

Also, students expressed how important it is that a teacher doesn't put students in embarrassing situations. There is a big concern among students with keeping face. Understanding what can be potentially embarrassing to students and trying to avoid situations in which they may be embarrassed or lose face should be the concern of teachers as well. Teaching styles and instructional strategies that call for student performance and demonstrations of competence in front of the whole class may put some students in the position of potentially losing face. This seems to be particularly the case of some Hmong men who became increasingly discouraged and dropped out after having to perform and making mistakes at the board and orally in front of other male friends, women and children. Finding alternative ways for some students to

perform, ones that are less anxiety-ridden with fear of appearing foolish and losing face, may not only help such students get more inclass practice but also help to keep them in class. Group work, in which students are working with people they are comfortable with and in front of a much smaller audience, is a less threatening arena for student performance and practice.

Finally, the relationship between a teacher and students is very important, and a teacher who was sincere and truly cared that his or her students learn was very highly regarded by all those interviewed. One student put it best by saying: "If we [students] don't open our hearts, nothing will penetrate." Empathy was considered to be a major asset of a sincere teacher. Students said that teachers should understand the difficulties and frustrations that they face in learning how to read, write, and do math. Two students mentioned that a sincere teacher was also one who gave homework. Students also said how important it is that the teacher be a good motivator who knows how to encourage students, who makes students want to learn and who doesn't act superior and condescend or talk down to students.

In any strive to reach students and help them learn in the most effective way possible, being a sincere teacher who can understand their difficulties and frustrations and encourages them to do their best may, with some students, be more important than any other aspect of the teacher's professional behavior and instructional strategies. Above all, it seems that Hmong students place a high value on teacher sincerity. Students can tell when a teacher is just going through the motions or is sincere about wanting to help students learn and better their lives. Though this may be true of students in general, it is particularly important for Hmong students.

An effective teacher motivates students. Part of that motivation is knowing what students are interested in and what is useful and relevant to their immediate lives. For Hmong adults, maintenance of language and culture, correspondence with relatives and friends, and gaining information about the community, their home country, and the world at large seem to be the main things that drive efforts to achieve literacy in Hmong. Also, a number of Hmong students have stated a belief that developing literacy in Hmong will help them later in their studies of English as a Second Language. Many of the students in this project did express a motivation to learn English, and some would ask teachers to let them take home for study copies of English language newspapers that teachers sometimes brought. However, for second language literacy and language development, a different set of motivational factors may apply. As Weinstein-Shr and Lewis (1989) found, assumptions about language and literacy skills that Hmong or other second language students need to survive may not always hold true. For any English as a Second Language program to be successful, information about these motivational factors and the purposes for which Hmong have both immediate and long-term need for English language and literacy must be gathered through observation, survey, interviews, and/or any other appropriate measure.

As one of the most common behaviors observed were students helping and learning from each other, it would seem that pairs and small groups may be the ideal units for learning in the classroom. While individual and whole class activities may also have a place, total reliance on such would thwart Hmong adults' inclinations toward helping and teaching others and may serve to inhibit students' learning. Cooperative learning groups may have a place, since such learning structures would not inhibit group members from helping each other. However, in many cooperative learning activities, students are assigned different tasks, and pair and small group activities in which students work on the same or similar tasks may be more in line with the way Hmong students' work together.

As repeated requests for examples were consistently observed throughout the classes, learning through demonstrations, modeling, and examples may be preferred by many Hmong students. In the classroom, frequent use of concrete examples through which students can contextualize what they are learning in terms of their own experiences and background knowledge may be more effective than other instructional strategies. For teaching skills such as higher order reading skills, a form of reciprocal teaching which utilizes modeling and demonstration may be more appropriate.

In terms of the behaviors of speaking aloud while both reading and writing, a number of students have said that they believed that they comprehended and composed better if they spoke aloud. However, there were also reports, some by the same students that believe that they understand better by reading aloud, that some students have a difficult time remembering earlier parts of the text they have read as they progress further through the text. It seems that these students are paying too much attention and cognitive processing capacity to decoding the text that there is little left for comprehension. Though the students are not always "sounding out" words, this reading aloud may be contributing to their difficulties in comprehending and recall. The teaching emphasis of the literacy classes also contribute to this overreliance on decoding at the expense of higher order comprehension skills. Throughout much of the coursework in the project, emphasis by both the teachers and students has generally been on learning consonants, vowels, blends and clusters, tone marks, etc., more as isolated bits than in a context. This pre-occupation with part to whole runs counter to some observations of Hmong students as having a whole to part learning style (Hvitfeldt, 1986). However, this emphasis on part to whole phonics may be more of a result of exposure to styles that have been ingrained upon teachers and students from their prior experiences in learning literacy skills in other educational situations. Both teachers and students have resisted attempts to get them to rely less on a phonics approach and more on whole-language and literature-based approaches in which the emphasis is on reading text in context rather than individual letters. All of the teachers, and many of the students, have experienced phonic approaches in their home country or in the refugee camps in Thailand, according to the teachers and research assistants, and feel that any other way is not real teaching, not being serious. Though some students' comprehension did seem to improve as they began decoding more efficiently later in the course, an earlier emphasis on comprehension may have produced better results. Conflicts

concerning the concepts of the reading and learning-to-read process between the students and teachers on one hand and the program developers on the other often lead to situations where, even if presumably more effective ways of teaching reading were implemented, success may be more limited due to both teacher and student beliefs and resistance.

In a future program in which these Hmong students (or any Hmong students already literate in Hmong) begin to develop English literacy and language skills, the Language Experience Approach may at least initially be a more effective approach for literacy development in English. This approach uses language produced by the students, either orally to a teacher who dictates or written, as the text through which reading skills are taught. If students read text with vocabulary and structure they haven't learned yet, it may encourage them to rely on decoding and "sounding out" the words. Giving them exposure to reading over and over English words that they know may help them to begin processing the words more holistically.

Most of the learning strategies observed or reported for learning individual letters and consonant clusters were visually oriented, as students made associations between objects they visualized and physical features of letters or associations between visualized objects and sounds of letters. For learning math, much fewer overt learning strategies were observed, and a lack of effective strategies may have had an effect upon their learning, as most of the complaints about forgetting at home what they learned in school that were observed or reported in teacher observation logs occurred in the math lessons. However, there may have been covert and unobservable strategy usage that occurred during math classes that were not observed, and teachers' logs sometimes reflected comments concerning combined literacy and math classes, so this speculation cannot be confirmed by the data gathered here.

To help students develop effective learning strategies, teachers may experiment with introducing different strategies in the classroom for student consideration. For example, for learning vocabulary, the Keyword method, in which visual associations are made between meaning and sounds, may work for some Hmong students. However, it is important for teachers not to assume that one particular learning strategy or type of strategy would work for all students of a particular culture. A number of other individual learning strategies were observed, and among any group of students from any culture, individual variation in the learning strategies students use may be greater than one may think. Different strategies may be introduced and covered in lessons, but they may not work for all. It is important for teachers to help students discover and use strategies that work for them.

Concluding Remarks

As seen from the descriptions and discussions here, there are numerous ways in which Hmong student behaviors may be different from those of American students or those of students from other cultures. Hopefully this information will help teachers, administrators, and other educational

professionals understand better not only what Hmong adult students do but also why as well. It is easy to imagine how uninformed teachers can easily misinterpret Hmong verbal and nonverbal behavior.

Caution must be advised in the interpretation and applicability of these findings. While there was some replication of results from studies such as Hvitfeldt's (1986), these results, for the most part, are valid mainly for these students in this particular region. Also, the Hmong are a flexible people who have adapted to a number of situations, and behaviors can change to meet new conditions. Some Hmong students, such as the two labeled "show-offs" by other Hmong students in this study, may individually vary in their behavior as they seek to adapt, survive, and acculturate to different degrees to different social and educational situations. It is the responsibility of teachers to do a little ethnographic work themselves, watch for patterns of behavior, seek out sources of cultural information, find out what topics and materials are relevant to the immediate lives of their students, and try to interpret verbal and nonverbal behavior without an overdue amount of influence from our own cultural filter through which we perceive the world around us.

Further research should be done to find out more about the cognitive learning strategies that Hmong students utilize to learn not only Hmong literacy but English language and literacy as well. Many of these strategies may not be overt, and different methods such as a think-aloud protocol can be employed to investigate these. Also, observation to investigate whether these behaviors carry over to other educational and social situations should be conducted. Finally, future research, particularly on students such as these who plan to study English language and literacy after having developed Hmong literacy skills, should be conducted to investigate how learning Hmong literacy will affect later English as a second language and literacy development. Do literacy skills transfer from the first language to the second language? From the second language to the first language? How may Hmong literacy affect second language development? Through study of English from written materials, translation, etc.? These and other questions bear investigation if we are to fully understand the effects of the development of one language and literacy upon another and to make a stronger case, beyond that of language and culture maintenance, for student development of first language literacy.

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